

6781
*The glorious and peaceable Tendency of the
Christian Religion.*

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED ON

THE FAST-DAY, 1795,

At the MEETING in JAMAICA-ROW, BERMONDSEY.

By JOHN TOWNSEND. *AK*

"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: Nation shall not lift up the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." ISAIAH.

"Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more. My ear is pain'd,
My soul is sick with ev'ry day's report
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is fill'd.
There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart:
It does not feel for man; the natural bond
Of brotherhood is sever'd as the flax
That falls asunder at the touch of fire." COWPER.

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S E R I E S

20. CHAIRMAN:

THE EAST-DAVE

SH. R. M. 11/10



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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE outlines of the following Sermon were composed on the afternoon preceding the Fast, and the substance of it delivered on the ensuing morning, without the most distant idea of its ever meeting the public eye. Its appearance in print is entirely owing to the earnest solicitations of some friends who heard it.

It is now almost impossible, for a man whose composition is from necessity plain and unadorned, if not incorrect, to offer any well-meant effort as a testimony of his esteem to the circle of his own friends (and out of that circle the Writer of this Sermon has no desire to find a single reader), without experiencing the utmost severity which the lash of snarl-
ing

ing critics can inflict. In the full expectation of this, the Writer consoles himself with this thought, that in gratifying the wish of friends, the mind feels a pleasure, which more than counterbalances the pain that arises from the censure of strangers.

The articles thrown into Notes, formed a part of the original plan of the Sermon, but were omitted in the delivery, and are printed in this form, that the Sermon printed may bear as great a resemblance to that preached, as a sermon delivered extempore well can.

JAMAICA-Row,

March 4, 1795.

A
S E R M O N,

&c. &c.

LUKE, ii. 14.

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good
will toward men.*

FEW periods in this century have been more interesting to this country, than the present. If we look back to the last two years, the review is peculiarly affecting: We have lost little, if any, short of fifty thousand of our countrymen, and spent an immense sum of money, which has produced to us no one advantage, either political, commercial, or religious. If we look forward, the clouds of our political hemisphere wear an unfavourable and lowering aspect; and unless we experience the special interposition of divine Providence, that *little cloud*, which now appears no larger than a man's hand, may burst upon us in a *great rain* *. All who seriously reflect upon the events which have taken place,

* 1 Kings, xviii. 44, 45.

and form just calculations of those which are in prospect, seem powerfully impressed with an idea that our situation is truly critical.

It is nevertheless very doubtful, whether this gloomy appearance of public affairs, has yet made that kind of impression upon the minds of the Public at large, as to be productive of any essential advantage. There are too many who never discern the hand of God, either in mercies or judgments, and who consequently derive no instruction from them*. Neither the appointment, nor the most scrupulous observance of such days as these, will evince that the nation is either instructed or humbled by adverse providences; because days of fasting and prayer have become a customary appendage to seasons of war and desolation, and are too often enjoined from motives, and attended to in a manner, which, to say the very best, bespeak a form of godliness without the power of it†. When a nation is guilty of such folly, it may justly be addressed in the language of severe reproof, used by an ancient prophet against a people, who too often exemplified the fact of which I am now speaking: *Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast which I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the op-*

* Isa. xxvi. 10, 11. † 2 Tim. iii. 5.

pressed go free, that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou bide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

The words of my text were occasioned by the incarnation of the promised Messiah, an event which had been predicted and prophesied of, all through the Old Testament, and which the patriarchs and prophets anticipated, by that faith which produces unspeakable joy and pleasure†. It was accomplished at a time, when peace reigned through all the known world. The language of the text, and the event which it celebrates, are therefore both applicable to the period of time in which they took place. The persons to whom the glad tidings of a Saviour born are here announced, are not wise and learned philosophers, nor yet the noble and honourable of the earth; but a company of poor shepherds, who were watching their flocks by night. Justly does the scripture say, *Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight‡.* And again, *Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty§.* The persons

* Isa. lviii. 5—7.

† John, viii. 56.

‡ Matt. xi. 25, 26.

§ 1 Cor. i. 26, 27.

who exult so loudly in this glorious transaction are *angels*. No envy rankles in their celestial bosoms, because such astonishing favour is shewed unto the human race, an inferior class of beings; while those of their own order, who kept not their first estate, are *reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day* *. Oh that Christians would learn of those heavenly choristers, the commendable and disinterested practice of rejoicing in the good of others!

On the first hearing this beautiful and transporting passage of scripture, you were probably led to think it irrevelant to the present occasion. If I had thought so, I would not have offered it to your consideration. But I am almost persuaded, that on a closer attention to it, you will be convinced that it is capable of affording suitable and instructive reflections. The desolating sword has long been unsheathed; it says not yet, that it is enough. It not only threatens to make new ravages in the ensuing season, but to bring them nearer to our own borders. Under the most distant apprehension, admitting only a mere probability, of feeling any of those calamities which this cruel scourge draws after it, we shall find the greatest reason to lament that all the obligations and duties of the Gospel of peace have been so long violated by hostile conflicts, and carry the mind forward in the expectation of that happy period, when all strife and contention shall cease,

and men change the instruments of war for those of husbandry. If then we are led into suitable ideas of the Christian religion—if we feel the obligations it lays its professors under—if we desire the full extent of its blessedness to be spread over all nations, let us unite with the angels in the words of the text, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.*

First: We learn from this scripture, the leading features of the Gospel dispensation, that dispensation which is the grand effect of the united exertions of all the divine perfections.

Oh that I had a mind to conceive, a heart to feel, and a tongue to proclaim, the full glory and blessedness of the Gospel scheme of man's redemption! But, alas! an angel's mind is not adequately to comprehend the magnitude; nor an angel's tongue competent to celebrate the just praises, of this stupendous work. While therefore it fills my mind with an admiration bordering upon transport, with a warm and devotional gratitude to its gracious Author, and an ardent desire to impress all your hearts with a deep and abiding sense of its infinite beauty and importance; I feel my own impotence and insufficiency, and am agitated by fear, lest I should eclipse rather than unveil the glory of this gospel of grace and peace, into which even the angels have an ardent and unabating desire to look*.

* 1 Pet. i. 12.

I. One of the important ends which God proposed to himself in the redemption of sinners was his own glory. The text is not merely an ascription of praise to God; but it is a declaration of his design to glorify himself by the revelation of peace and good will to man. It is, indeed, one of the most beautiful and prominent features of Christianity, that while it brings pardon and grace to the sinner in time, and promises glory in eternity, it amply provides for the divine honour. This truth is illustrated and confirmed in the Old Testament: *The Lord hath redeemed Jacob and glorified himself in Israel* *. *This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise* †. The New Testament corroborates the Old. Jesus Christ, who must necessarily have well understood all the objects of his own mission, states this as one great end of it. Speaking of himself, in the character of *the Son of man*, he says, *God is glorified in him* ‡. And again, *I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do* §. The apostle Peter also, who either learned this doctrine from his Master's own lips, or from the immediate teachings of the Holy Ghost, who wonderfully assisted him after the day of Pentecost, speaks of God being in all things glorified by Jesus Christ ||; and the apostle Paul speaks of God as directing all which is done for the church to one great end, *that we should be to the praise of his glory*.

* Isa. xliv. 23.

† Isa. xliii. 21.

‡ John, xiii. 31.

§ John, xvii. 4.

|| 1 Pet. iv. 11.

But how has God effected this great object, by the Gospel dispensation? He hath glorified his wisdom in its contrivance; there is not only an *abounding of wisdom and prudence* *, but there is room to exclaim, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God* †! God has glorified his justice and holiness by inflicting the tremendous punishment of sin upon Christ as a surety ‡. He has glorified his grace and love, in choosing, adopting, pardoning, and sanctifying his church in the Lord Jesus Christ §. And he will continue to glorify himself in and by his people to all eternity. The redemption of the church does not glorify one perfection at the expence of another, but they all beautifully unite, and reflect a lustre one upon the other. *Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other* ||. And the result of this wonderful combination of the divine attributes in the salvation of sinners, is one united and eternal anthem of praise; the theme of which is, *Glory to God in the highest*.

II. This gracious dispensation reveals the blessing of peace with God. Man by nature is carnal and sensual **. And consequently his *mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be* ††. In thought, word, and deed, unconverted sinners are uniformly hostile to

* Ephes. i. 8.

† Rom. xi. 33.

‡ Isa. liii. 4, 5, 6. 11.

§ Ephes. i. 3—7.

|| Psal. lxxxv. 10.

** Ephes. ii. 2, 3.

†† Rom. viii. 7.

the truth, grace, and perfections of God. They are *enemies by wicked works* *. They are *alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of the heart* †. And to add to their wretchedness, when their sin and guilt is charged upon them, and the danger of perishing in a state of rebellion against the God of heaven is set before them, they make light of it, say they have *not sinned* ‡, and ask, *Wherein shall we return* § ? This is a portrait of human nature which contains many dark shades, its outlines are laid down in the scriptures by the pencil of truth, and he that draws a more favourable picture of the *natural man* §, makes it unlike the original.

But let us look to the Gospel—what are the glad tidings it announces? “*Peace on earth.*” An offended God smiles, and offending sinners are brought into a state of friendship and peace. This great work is effected solely by the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose birth the angels sang the delightful truths contained in the text. Jesus Christ is called the *Prince of peace* **. The apostle affirms, *He is our peace, and hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby* ††. And it is the in-

* Col. i. 21. † Ephes. iv. 18. ‡ Jer. ii. 35. § Mal. iii. 7.
§ 1 Cor. ii. 14. ** Isa. ix. 6. †† Ephes. ii. 14—16.

dispensable duty of all Christian ministes to employ themselves incessantly, in *preaching peace by Jesus Christ* *. One of the passages just cited, not only declares our peace to come by Jesus Christ, but points out the precise ground upon which it is effected: Not by any act of ours, but *by the cross*, Christ became an *offering for sin* †. He reconciles us to God by his *death* ‡. Nor is it possible for us to feel that peace in our consciences which passeth all understanding §, until we are truly acquainted with that reconciliation with God, which Christ has procured by his bearing sin in his own body on the tree. And yet this doctrine of the cross is very offensive, and appears foolishness, to all self-righteous Pharisees ||. And also to the *fleshly wisdom* ¶ of all those, who are beguiled *through philosophy, and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ* **. Oh the folly and sin of those professors of religion, who slight the way of reconciliation revealed in the Gospel, and accomplished by the payment of such an immense price ††; and who vainly imagine they can make their own peace with God, and obtain mansions of glory by their good works, the best of which, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, are found essentially defective, in the motives from whence they spring, the manner and spirit in which they are performed,

* Acts, x. 36.

† Isa. liii. 10.

‡ Rom. v. 10.

§ Phil. iv. 7.

|| 1 Cor. i. 18. 23.

¶ 2 Cor. i. 12.

** Col. ii. 8.

†† 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

and the end to which they are directed. On the contrary, how highly privileged the real Christian, who *being justified by faith*, obtains *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* *. This man's religion is not made up of a mere name, an orthodox creed, or an external shew of piety: But his conscience feels the beneficial effects of *peace on earth*. He possesses a serenity of mind to which the men of the world, and the hypocrites in Zion, are utter strangers †. His religion is *righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost* ‡.

III. The Gospel dispensation exemplifies Jehovah's *good will towards men*. There is hardly any branch of divine truth, but either directly or indirectly, tends to confound the wisdom, and mortify the pride of those wise and prudent disputers of this world §, who set up their own reason as a competent judge of *the deep things of God* ||, and not only undervalue and reject, but make the Spirit's teaching and influence the object of their contempt and ridicule; notwithstanding, to be *led by the spirit of God*, is one of the great evidences of being the children of God **. God having manifested *good will towards men*, is an instance of sovereign grace. In the Gospel, no voice of mercy is heard to address fallen angels. Not so much as a hint that Jesus came to save them. No promises of pardon, or deliverance to encourage hope; but they are shut up in one

* Rom. v. 1. † Isa. xxvi. 3. and lvii. 21. ‡ Rom. xiv. 17.
 § 1 Cor. i. 19, 20. || 1 Cor. ii. 10. ** Rom. viii. 14.

eternal night of darkness and despair. In this pleasing, this transporting sentence, *good will towards men*, we not only see a line drawn between fallen angels and fallen men, but hear the eternal God asserting the sovereignty of his grace, in language similar to *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion* *. If then the salvation of sinful men is founded in the free favour and sovereign mercy of God, the greatest Christian has nothing wherein to glory before the Lord. He should frequently address himself in such language as this, Who made me to differ, and what have I that I have not received †? He must ascribe all his spiritual blessings to the same source as Paul, who was once a persecutor, and a blasphemer, and who, when he reflected upon the happy change he had experienced, exclaimed, *By the grace of God I am what I am* ‡. Have we tasted and felt that *good will towards men*, which the Lord has expressed in sending his own Son to save sinners? Are we brought out of our sinful and miserable condition into a state of grace? Are we enriched with spiritual blessings? Are we made the heirs of eternal glory? If we are thus privileged, let us remember we owe all to our heavenly Father's *good-will*.

Let us then pause before we pass to the second head of discourse. Let us reflect upon this wise, this gracious dispensation of mercy to the human race. Let us attempt to scan the height and

* Rom. ix. 15.

† 1 Cor. iv. 7.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

depth, the length and breadth of that amazing love which induced the glorious Redeemer to visit our earth in human nature. Let us call to remembrance the extensive, the lasting obligations we are under to glorify God, with our bodies and our souls, which are both his, whose *good will* we have so largely experienced.

If we thus know and feel the blessings of this Gospel, it is our duty to rejoice even in tribulation, to eye all human events as under the controlling influence of divine Providence; and in times of public calamity, view the rising and wide-spreading storm, not only without despair, but without the least anxiety of mind, from a consideration that God is our friend, our refuge, and our strength*. The good man is sure to rest and stand in his lot at the end of the days†; his only concern, therefore, should be to do the will of God, by acting in conformity to the letter and spirit of the Christian religion.

Secondly: Having viewed the Christian religion as delineated in the text, I shall proceed to shew what those ought to be, and how those ought to act, who profess to believe it, and walk under its influence.

As professors of Christianity, we should aim at the *glory of God*, be promoters of *peace on earth*, and live in the constant expression of *good will towards men*. This is the law and the prophets, and as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on

* Psa. xlv. 1. 4.

† Dan. xii. 13.

them. The nature and design of the Gospel dispensation, teaches us to be imitators of God *: To be *followers of that which is good* †. *The same mind is to be in us, which was in Christ Jesus* ‡. And what was the tenour of his conduct while on earth? It was his meat and his drink to do the will, and consequently to glorify God. He was a lover of peace, and when Peter, in the warmth of his zeal, would have defended his insulted Master by force of arms, Jesus said to him, *Put up thy sword into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword* §. He went about doing good, which is only another term for *good will*. He carried this divine temper to such a height, that of the people who reviled, scourged, and crucified him, he said, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* ||. Let us also remember, that those duties which result from the nature of the Christian religion, and which were so beautifully exemplified in the practice of our Divine Master, are separately and distinctly enjoined in the word. In this second head of discourse I shall enlarge upon the nature of these duties, and seriously urge the practice of them.

I. It is the duty of all who profess the Christian religion, constantly and in all things to aim at the glory of God. Sin has so debased the human mind, and corrupted all its powers, that all the actions of ungodly men are naturally and uniformly founded

* Matt. v. 48.

† 1 Pet. iii. 13.

‡ Phil. ii. 5.

§ Matt. xxvi. 52.

|| Luke, xxiii. 34.

in self-love. In all they do, either in civil life, or in the church, the highest end proposed by them is the gratification either of their own pride, or their self-righteousness, and not unfrequently to promote their worldly interest. Hence, notwithstanding they profess to love and fear God, they are the exact opposite of all that God requires of his professing people, and which was strongly urged upon the Jews in the following words: *I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified**. To glorify God was one great end of man's creation: And believers are strictly enjoined by the apostle, *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God†*. This is the very issue to which the Lord directs adverse providences in the experience of individuals, churches, and nations. *Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires‡: Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me§*. May the God of peace speedily deliver us from the calamitous war in which we are now engaged, and cause his own glory to arise out of it. *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain||*.

But how is God glorified by his creatures? When they love, fear, and trust in him. It is said of Abraham, *He staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God***. Men glorify God when they unfeignedly reverence

* Lev. x. 3.

† 1 Cor. x. 31.

‡ Isa. xxiv. 15.

§ Psal. l. 15.

|| Psal. lxxv. 10.

** Rom. iv. 20.

and adore him in his ordinances and worship. David, after exhorting the believer to *give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name*, immediately adds, *Bring an offering, and come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness* *. And God himself condescends to say, *Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me* †. They glorify God who unreservedly consecrate themselves to him: *Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's* ‡. When that grace which changes and sanctifies the heart, operates powerfully to an abundant production of the fruits of righteousness, God is glorified. This is evidently the language of Christ to his disciples, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven* §. And again, *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit* ||. Once more, men glorify God when they lay themselves out to promote the knowledge of God, and his salvation among those who lie in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

From what has been said, it appears to be the indispensable duty of all who profess the Christian religion, to be jealous for, and aim to promote the glory of God. On examining how far we as a nation have collectively regarded this duty, I fear that the inquiry will turn out to our discredit, inasmuch as it has been almost totally neglected. If we turn our

* Psal. xcvi. 8, 9.

† Psal. l. 15.

‡ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

§ Matt. v. 16.

|| John, xv. 8.

attention to the most thoughtless and immoral part of the community (and I fear they are the largest number), we must perceive, that so far from having any concern for the glory of God, they have him not in all their thoughts. They are mere sensualists, who say to themselves, *Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry* *. There are too many of them infidels in judgment, and atheists in practice; living in all manner of sin and wickedness, blaspheming the holy name of God, prophaneing his sabbaths, treating the scripture and all the ordinances of Christianity not only with indifference, but contempt. Surely, this part of the nation have neither known, nor imbibed any part of the spirit of Christianity. Let us then look where it is more natural to expect, that the *glory of God* is esteemed and regarded as an object of the first magnitude. Yes, we will look to the externally moral, and devout professors of religion. Surely, all who bear the name, and profess to be the disciples, of the lowly and benevolent Jesus, imitate him in doing the will of God, and glorifying him in all their ways. Alas! the scene is truly discouraging. On the one hand, the doctrines, the precepts, and the worship of God, are all corrupted and debased by the traditions of those men, who, while they have wandered extremely wide of the simplicity and purity of the Gospel, have totally lost its favour and power. On the other, where the doctrines, precepts, and ordinances of

* Luke, xii. 19.

Christianity are all retained unadulterated, still the scene is distressing. So much formality, so much worldly-mindedness, so much hypocrisy, such a prevailing love of pleasure, and such an indifference to all the more important branches of true religion, pervades professors of every denomination, that, instead of glorifying God, they cause his name to be blasphemed*, and the truth to be evil spoken of†. This is a gloomy, but it is a faithful picture of the professing world. It is however considerably alleviated, by the recollection that there are a few in our country, *a few names even in (our) Sardis, which have not defiled their garments*‡. These are living witnesses, both of the truth and power of the Christian religion; and by adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour, they put to silence the gainsaying of foolish men.

But there are some mediums whereby God is dishonoured, the sin whereof is more immediately attached to those on whom is conferred the power and privilege of administering political institutions. I shall select three instances in which this remark applies to our own country.

1. God is greatly dishonoured by the Christian religion being made an instrument to promote the views of interested men. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world§. The Christian religion has no one principle in it, which qualifies it for a political

* Rom. ii. 24.

† 2 Pet. ii. 2.

‡ Rev. iii. 4.

§ John, xviii. 36.

alliance. Nor has a union of this kind ever been formed but from maxims of worldly policy. It is the device of crafty statesmen, who use the name of religion to promote political purposes, and not out of any real friendship either to religion or those who believe and love it: The union is unnatural, and debases Christianity, inasmuch as it gives opportunity to men, who are totally destitute of divine knowledge, and have never felt the converting or sanctifying power of grace upon their own hearts, to assume the office of ministers, allured by the enticing charms of power, wealth, and honour: In the bestowment of which, no regard is shown to merit*. It is never so much as thought of whether the

* The very unequal distribution of ecclesiastical revenues is a glaring defect in the established church, and has long and justly been complained of, especially by that part of the clergy on whom devolves the principal part of parochial duty. The absolute necessity of an alteration in this particular must appear evident to every impartial man who attentively reads the adjoined statement. It is an account of ten Curates in the country, most of them in Wales, who have lately been elected by the trustees of Mr. Stock's liberal donation to receive ten pounds each.

The first column contains the names of the gentlemen, the second the number of their children, and the last the amount of their salaries.

<i>Names.</i>			<i>Children.</i>	<i>£'s per year.</i>
John Evans	—	—	5	— 25
Rice	—	—	9	— 35
John Jones	—	—	8	— 25
John Jones	—	—	6	— 25
James Marshall	—	—	8	— 25
Evan Meredith	—	—	4	— 13
				Rees

the candidate for ecclesiastical preferment will take

<i>Names.</i>			<i>Children.</i>	<i>£s per year.</i>
Rees Price	—	—	7	30
James Rowlands	—	—	8	18
John Stubbs	—	—	8	30
Evan Williams	—	—	6	15

Supposing the mothers of these children to be alive, the result of the statement is as follows: These ten curacies yield 241 l. for the yearly support of 89 persons, which is not 2 l. 15 s. for each individual, or less than two-pence per day for their whole maintenance. Read this, ye ecclesiastical drones, who, while lolling at your ease in the lap of plenty, shout *No reform, no reform!* Read this, and blush, that while you are basking in the sunshine of clerical prosperity, abounding in wealth, rolling through the streets in your splendid equipages, and *some* of you annually spending more at balls, routs, theatres, and card-parties, than the whole amount of the salary of these ten curates---Oh! blush to think that while you are thus living in splendour and faring sumptuously every day, and scarce condescending to touch the burden of ecclesiastical duty with one of your little fingers, think how many curates in this country are almost starved, or constrained, like paupers (not to their own disgrace, but that of their superiors), to live upon the charity of those who are unable to see the wretched situation of these worthy men without an attempt to alleviate it. Though this note is already long, I cannot suppress my inclination to transcribe a remarkable case related in the *Obituary of the Gentleman's Magazine* for Nov. 1793, page 1053. "Oct. 30, died, " in his 63d year, in the workhouse at Deal, where he had been " with his wife and six children, near two years, the Rev. James " Atkins, who was reduced to the necessity of ending his days " in such a degrading abode, by sickness and an ill state of health, " which rendered him unfit for serving in the chapel at Deal, to " which he was some time a curate. He had received a liberal " education at one of our universities, and was a respectable scholar; yet, though he had been 39 years in orders, a curacy was " the only means he ever had for the support of himself and " family." These are facts which need no comment, they speak for themselves.

heed to himself and his doctrines*, whether he will feed the flock over which he is made an overseer†: Whether he would do the work of an evangelist, and make full proof his ministry‡, and be faithful unto death§. All these considerations are overlooked, while family connexions and parliamentary influence are all in all. The effect too often is, that religion is disgraced, its progress obstructed, and the unbelief and opposition of infidels strengthened and confirmed.

2. God is greatly dishonoured, and his glory disregarded, when by public authority a divine ordinance is profaned and degraded by being appropriated to a use foreign to that for which it was instituted; and by its being enjoined as a duty upon men whom God expressly forbids to approach on pain of the most awful consequences to themselves||, who when they approach might justly be addressed in the words of the Lord to his ancient people the Jews, *What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee***. The reception of the Lord's Supper, as a qualification for civil and military offices, for the purpose of securing all places of trust and emolument under the government to members of the established church, is not only considered by Dissenters as a reflection upon the wisdom and the justice of the country, and as a great sin against

* 1 Tim. iv. 16.

† 1 Pet. v. 2.

‡ 2 Tim. iv. 5.

§ Rev. ii. 10.

|| 1 Cor. xi. 28. 31.

** Psal. l. 16, 17.

God; but it is loudly complained of by Churchmen themselves*.

3. The government of a country dishonours God, when it sacrifices the well-known and long-established principles of justice and humanity, to the urgent pleas of a crooked policy, and the temporal advantage of a few individuals, unto whom a fair compensation might be easily made in the case now alluded to. The principle, the mode, and the effects of the *Slave Trade*, have all received a free and ample discussion, and the gross injustice and the horrid wickedness of the whole is demonstrated in the fullest manner. It includes a direct violation of

* Notwithstanding the following quotation from a fast sermon, preached by the Rev. Mr. Newton, of St. Mary Woolnoth, about 12 years ago, has often been cited as containing a strong description of the sin of thus abusing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, yet I shall introduce it from a supposition that some readers may not have seen it, and because it is the sentiment of a gentleman who can have no kind of interest in the question of the abolition of the Test Laws:—"As the case stands at present (says Mr. Newton) we frequently see professed infidels and notorious libertines approach the Lord's table as matters of course, and prostituting the most solemn ordinances of Christianity to their ambition and interest. The great number and variety of appointments civil and military, which cannot be legally possessed without this qualification, render the enormity almost as common as it is heinous. If the Lord be a God of knowledge, he cannot be deceived: If he be a God of holiness, he will not be mocked. I fear we have been too long guilty of a contemptuous prophanation of the body and blood of Christ."—The honour of religion, and the glory of God, are both tarnished by the Test Act.

all the obligations (human and divine) which we owe to our fellow-creatures. It entails upon them mental and corporeal wretchedness of the worst species. Its prominent features are theft and murder. For facts have been adduced in proof of these, by which it appears that one part of the inhabitants of a village or town have been murdered, and another part stolen, and the village itself devoted to destruction *. From all these considerations it

* I should be sorry, in expressing my abhorrence of the cruelty and injustice of this traffic, to be guilty of the slightest exaggeration. That I have not will appear evident from the following quotation taken from a sermon of the Rev. Mr. Newton's, preached at his own church, Feb. 28, 1794. On account of the passage having been so often copied into different publications, I would willingly have resorted elsewhere for evidence of the truth of what I have said, but I knew no one who had a more competent knowledge of the subject, or in whose testimony we could place more ample confidence: Speaking of the Slave Trade, he says, " I do not reckon this among our national sins, because I hope and believe a very great majority of the nation earnestly long for its suppression. But hitherto petty and partial interest prevail against the voice of justice, humanity, and truth. This enormity, however, is not sufficiently laid to heart. If you are justly shocked by what you hear of the cruelties practised in France, you would perhaps be shocked much more, if you could fully conceive of the evils and miseries inseparable from this traffic, which I apprehend, not from hearsay, but from my own observation, are equal in atrocity, and perhaps superior in number, in the course of a single year, to any or all the worst actions which have been known in France since the commencement of their revolution. There is a cry of blood against us, a cry accumulated by the accession of fresh victims, of thousands, of scores of thousands, I had almost said of hundreds of thousands from year to year."

appears but too evident, that though we are a people professing the Christian religion, by which God designed to glorify himself, that as a people we neither study nor aim at his glory; but live and act too much in direct opposition to all the principles and duties of our holy faith. And if we thus walk contrary to God, what can we expect but that he will walk contrary to us?

II. Those who profess the Christian religion should endeavour to promote "*peace on earth.*" They should stand foremost among the *peace-makers*, of whom the Redeemer says, they are *blessed*: Yea, they shall be called the children of God*. The disposition I am now recommending to you as congenial to the spirit of true religion, is of more importance perhaps than most professors are aware; for when enjoined as a duty, it is connected with some of the most interesting parts of religion, *righteousness, faith, and charity*†. The Quakers, in considering every species of war as contrary to the letter and spirit of Christianity, are thought by some to be in a great error. Allowing it to be so, they err so much on the side of humanity, and their error has such a beneficial tendency, that it would be a blessing if all the governments of the world were instantly precipitated into it.

I. Christians should be *peace-makers* in the family; the beauty, the strength, the happiness of families, result from their harmony and peace. Jo-

* Matt. v. 9.

† 2 Tim. ii. 22.

seph gave it in charge to his brethren, *See that ye fall not out by the way* *. And David highly commends the beauty of that family from whence discord is banished—*Behold how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity* †.

2. The Christian religion also teaches us to promote peace in the church. The importance of believers being *at peace among themselves* ‡, may be inferred from the frequent and earnest exhortations given to the churches on this head. The substance of the whole is comprehended in that given in Ephes. iv. 3. *endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*. Our obligation to this duty is increased and strengthened by the remembrance of Christians having one common interest in God, and being related to each other as members of the same body §. While the Scripture commends the *peace-maker*, it marks the opposite character with an odium, and towards them uses the language of sharp reproof: *He that soweth discord among brethren, is one of the things which Solomon affirms are an abomination to the Lord* ||. And the apostle Paul is exceedingly pointed in his censures upon those who sound the trumpet of war and strife in the churches. *I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them, for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies, and by good*

* Gen. xlv. 24.

† Psal. cxxxiii. 1.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 13.

§ 1 Cor. xii. 12. 21.

|| Prov. vi. 18, 19.

words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple.*

3. Christianity not only makes it our duty to regard the peace of our families, and of our churches, but it is a duty that we owe to the world at large, to attain a universal and an established *peace on earth*. It is not necessary for all men to be of one colour, to speak one language, to profess one mode of religious worship, or live under one form of government. Notwithstanding the greatest diversity in these things, the duty of all the followers of the *Prince of Peace* is distinctly laid down in the following scriptures: *Follow peace with all men†. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men‡.*

4. There is one article more on which I shall more largely insist than either of the preceding. It is the duty of promoting the peace of that community in which God has fixed the bounds of our habitation. I will say to you what the prophet said to the Jews of old, *seek the peace of the city, and pray for it, for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace§.* The interruption of social harmony in a country, is indeed a tremendous scourge. *Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation||. If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another**.* This evil is frequently inflicted upon a people, as a just punishment from God for their transgressions. It is threatened against Idumea,

* Rom. xvi. 17, 18. † Heb. xii. 14. ‡ Rom. xii. 18.
§ Jer. xxix. 7. || Matt. xii. 25. ** Gal. v. 15.

be shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion *. Civil war is an evil, the extent and magnitude of which was practically demonstrated in this country during the last century; and the history of it stands as a beacon not only to warn, but also to direct those who govern, and those who are governed, in the paths of duty and interest. The man who has attentively read the history of that period, and either directly or indirectly, takes any step towards the introduction of a scourge so subversive of all social happiness, whatever be his rank or circumstances in society, must be as destitute of all human prudence as he is of moral reflection.

Civil wars in general arise, either from injustice and oppression on the part of the great and opulent, or from ignorance and causeless discontent on the part of the poor and indigent. The duty therefore of seeking to promote internal peace, is not the duty of one class of citizens only, but it is the duty of all. To preserve a country in peace, it is the duty of those who govern to use every means and strain every nerve to conciliate the esteem, and merit the approbation of the people at large, by a wise, economical, and impartial administration of their respective powers.

A whole nation is one large family, towards whom the governing powers should act as a common parent, directing every measure to the security and comfort of the whole; and as the happiness of

* Isa. xxxiv. 11.

a family is much promoted by its harmony, the parent should direct all his exertions to strengthen the general bond of unity, by instructing and reclaiming those who have fallen into mistakes and errors, and also by inquiring into, and redressing the complaints of the unhappy and discontented, provided they are well founded. But if, instead of those marks of attention to the interest and unity of the family, the parent manifests partiality, injustice, and oppression, then he himself is an aggressor, and becomes chargeable with sowing the seeds of discontent.

Again, the revenues and resources of a community are a common stock, in which each of its members have a lesser or greater interest. If therefore the steward, to whose care is entrusted the directing of this general fund to the ends for which it was provided, instead of laying it out wisely, and carefully, for the interest and advantage of its original proprietors, should squander it away in a thoughtless and prodigal manner, it becomes an almost inevitable source of dissatisfaction and murmuring through all that society whose interest is thus wantonly sacrificed.

Once more, when all the inhabitants of a country manifest a concern for the general interest, and respect and obey those laws which are essential to the well-being of the whole society, they have an equal claim to the protection and good will of the ruling powers; and of course all disqualifying and penal statutes on the score of religious opinions, are not

only impolitic and unjust, as they make an invidious distinction between children of the same family, but they have in them the properties of persecution for conscience sake; and through the natural texture of the human mind, become the source of strife and discontent. All those therefore who rule in the state, should become *peace-makers*, by a wise, moderate, economical, and impartial administration of the powers with which they are entrusted. It is a duty they owe both to God and their country, and is a means of promoting *peace on earth*.

It is the duty of all descriptions of men to strive together for this desirable end by sacrificing their jealousies and animosities. It is plain, by what has already been advanced, that it is the call of religion; it recommends itself to a people upon the principle of self-interest; for war, and especially a civil war, carries its own punishment with it to all that comes under its lash; while peace extends its beneficial influence in every direction possible, and wonderfully increases the sum of public and private happiness. It is the call of humanity. War, foreign or domestic, draws so many evils after it, that it should never be resorted to but in the last extremity. What are the calamities of war? Towns and villages reduced to ashes, and the distressed inhabitants constrained to fly in every direction. The fruitful and highly cultivated vale, with all its rich and variegated productions, ravaged and trodden down in the most wanton manner, and thereby changed into a desolate and barren wilderness. The plain, where the
horrid

horrid conflict took place, is bespread with the bodies of the wounded, the dying, and the dead, all lying in one awful confusion, while widows and orphans are increased beyond all calculation. I doubt not but your compassionate minds sicken at the awful recital, and breathe forth ardent desires for the coming of that day, when the nations of the earth shall learn war no more.

Before I leave this part of the subject, I shall particularly enjoin it upon you to aim at promoting the peace of your country by your words, temper, and actions, that you may in the fullest manner contradict the slanders which have been cast upon them who dissent from our national church: The Dissenters have repeatedly been libelled as enemies to peace and good order, and no small exertions have been made to bring them under an odium, and to excite against them a general indignation. This has not been done by a few illiterate men merely; for these, ignorance would have served as an apology: But it has been done by men, whose knowledge on all other subjects reproaches them for their want of information on this, and the nature of whose office should have prevented their dealing in slander and calumny, or indulging themselves in revenge and malice*. To

* Whoever has seen many of the sermons of the higher orders of the clergy, preached on the two preceding fast-days, has seen the bitter invectives which have been thrown out against Dissenters indiscriminately. The natural tendency of these sermons has been, not that of healing divisions, but to increase contentions and ill will.

charge the Dissenters with disloyalty and a disposition to stir up confusion in the state, is in the most barefaced manner to scandalize a body of men, who, together with their ancestors, from the first moment of their final separation from the church, have, as a body, manifested a peaceable and orderly disposition, and have proved themselves as firm friends to the government and constitution under which they have lived, as any subjects in the kingdom *.

I have no doubt, therefore, but you will study to promote peace and good order in society, and thereby lend your assistance practically to contradict the slander of those, who earnestly seek occasions of reproach against a numerous, well-meaning, and orderly part of the community.

Those, who dissent from the Established Church, have a grand example of quiet submission to the civil powers, and patient suffering even under the most distressing circumstances, in those excellent men who were ejected from their livings by the Act of Uniformity, 1662 †. They, in like manner as the

* The only instance in which they have shewn a disposition to resistance was, when they assisted the leading members of the established church to overturn the arbitrary government of James II. and to introduce what we have been used to style *the glorious Revolution*. But the ideas formed of that event, and the principles on which it took place, are so different to what they were formerly, that there is room to exclaim, *How is the gold become dim, how is the most fine gold changed!* Lam. iv. 1.

† The two thousand ejected ministers have often been the subject of reproach, to them who have not fairly appreciated their principles

the saints of old, *had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments; they wandered about, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth* *.

And how did they conduct themselves under all these complicated sufferings? They prayed for the government which persecuted them; they preached patience and resignation to their hearers, who were their companions in tribulation. The greatest crime that could be attributed to them as a body, was, that they exercised the unalienable rights of conscience, in rejecting a religion prescribed for them, by an authority to which no man is amenable, either for his faith or worship, and continued to worship God by stealth, not unfrequently in some dreary wood at the hour of midnight. But so odious are the Puritans of the last, and the Dissenters of the present century, to the jaundiced eyes of some men, that nothing is too bad to be either said or wrote against them. *Be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and*

principles and conduct. And though the greater part of them were learned, pious, disinterested men, Thirtieth of January sermons, and other publications of the same stamp, have branded them as ignorant, immoral, and mercenary hypocrites. This, however, is far from being the opinion of all churchmen: These worthy men have obtained a verdict in their favour, from Locke, Hervey, Toplady, and many other excellent men of the establishment, who have passed high, but just and impartial eulogiums upon them.

* Heb. xi. 36. 38.

harmless as doves *. Your enemies watch for your haltings ; some of them would even rejoice to find Dissenters those disaffected persons which their own imagination and prejudice have so falsely represented them to be, and would shout “ Aha ! aha ! so would we have it ! ” Let us strive to live down these slanders : Let these words, “ *Peace on Earth*,” be our motto ; and let us strive to promote it in every direction.

But, to conclude this branch of the subject.—If it be the duty of individuals, and consequently of nations, professing the Christian religion, to promote *peace on earth*, from whence have arisen those frequent and destructive wars, which have so often afflicted (not barbarous and savage nations only, but) the nations of Christendom ?—nations, to promote whose happiness, science and revelation have long since lent their mutual aid. One short scripture will solve the difficulty : *From whence come wars and fightings among you ? come they not hence, even of your lusts, which war in your members* † ? Christianity is too often professed, where it is neither known, felt, nor practised. Men call themselves Christians, while they remain the subjects of every infernal passion. Pride, ambition, and love of pre-eminence, are prominent features in the human character. Even the disciples were strongly tinctured with these dispositions : *For by the way, they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest* ‡. Here we be-

* Matt. x. 16.

† James, iv. 1.

‡ Mark, ix. 34.

hold the very principle from whence most of the wars which have ravaged the world take their rise. If half the exertions which Princes and Statesmen have made to obtain merely a nominal pre-eminence, had been directed to extend commerce, improve agriculture, and instruct the lower orders of mankind in social and religious duties, the nations in whose names they have acted would not only have enjoyed that invaluable blessing *peace*, but they would all have been infinitely superior to what they now are. Instead of which, they have been actuated by a narrow, selfish policy, and a secret and sullen jealousy, which has ultimately led to the expenditure of immense treasures, and the shedding of torrents of blood*; in return for which, few of them have obtained any thing more than a fame for naval and military exploits, which is only as chaff to the wheat, when compared with the blessings of peace, and the advantages which invariably follow in its train. These fruitless and wicked conflicts have sometimes been attributed to one cause, and sometimes to another: Each of the contending parties have laid the blame upon the other, and charged them with some real or imaginary aggression. One fact is plain: All the nations denominated Christian, have too much forgotten the nature and obligations of Christianity, and dishonoured God by an

* It is computed, that in the last thirty-four years, war has cost this little island five hundred thousand lives, and two hundred millions of money! What then must be the average of all Europe, for the same space of time?

appeal to him for the justice of a cause, in the prosecution of which they have violated both the spirit and the letter of that religion of which he is the author.

III. Another branch of the duty arising from the nature of the Gospel dispensation is, a constant and universal expression of good will towards men: *For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen* ?*

1. The primary and direct line in which this duty runs is, *especially unto them who are of the household of faith †*. The saints are members of the same body, and constituent branches of that family, of which God is the kind and indulgent father. The near relation which Christians stand in to each other, and their mutual obligations, are beautifully described by the Apostle, 1 Cor. xii. 20, 21. *But now are they many members, yet but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of thee.* The good will which Christians owe to each other is set forth by our Lord, in the commendation which he intimates would be pronounced upon his disciples in the last day: *I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me ‡*.

* 1 John, iv. 20. † Gal. vi. 10. ‡ Mat. 25. 35, 36—40.

2. It is sometimes enjoined upon Christians, upon a more broad and extensive scale: *Do good unto all men*.*.

This injunction is illustrated and confirmed by the parable of the good Samaritan, which our Lord delivered as an answer to the lawyer's question, *Who is my neighbour?* This grand lesson of instruction seems to imply, that the *Priest* and the *Levite* were not only under the influence of an inhuman indifference to the wounded man, but also that they were actuated by religious prejudices, esteeming him, perhaps, a schismatic or an heretic, and therefore unworthy of their charity. The good Samaritan, regardless of any such narrow-minded considerations, esteemed misery the proper object of mercy, and wretched helplessness the suitable object of beneficence, and therefore shewed his good will towards him; for, *when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him* †. If we only exercise pity towards the wretched of our own party, or to those of our own language, habits, and opinions, may it not be said to us, *If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so* ‡?

* Gal. vi. 10. † Luke, x. 33, 34. ‡ Matt. v. 46, 47.

I therefore proceed to remind you—

3. That Christianity includes a more noble and exalted principle than either of the two I have already mentioned: It teaches to forgive and forget injuries; to forego all enmity and ill-will against our enemies; but rather to give them every mark of our *good will*. Thus speaks the Founder of the Christian religion: *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you* *. If therefore it be unlawful for one individual to revenge himself upon another, it must be equally contrary to the spirit of religion for nations to act towards each other upon principles of revenge. And if to starve and murder only one fellow-creature, be a direct violation of all the principles of religion, surely to starve or murder thousands, in a spirit of revenge, must necessarily be a crime of a much blacker complexion.

But how shall we express our *good will towards men*? particularly towards such as are not of the household of faith. 1. By promoting, as much as in us lies, their temporal interest. The scripture particularizes the branches of this duty: *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good* †. 2. We may shew our *good will towards men* by exercising pity to their souls, and using the means of

* Matt. v. 44.

† Rom. xii. 20, 21.

leading them into the way of righteousness and truth*.

I will conclude the whole of what respects the duty of shewing *good will towards men*, by saying, that if the description I have given of Christianity be scriptural, then it follows, that most, yea all the nations who profess this religion, have violated its principles in the most awful manner, and are still going on to do so; which indeed, next to an humble confession of our own sins, becomes the proper subject of this day's sorrow and lamentation. Those who foment,

* The great apostle of the Gentiles constantly aimed at glorifying God, and shewing his good will to men in this way; and the sight of men wholly given up to ignorance and idolatry, scarce ever failed to excite in his breast the most lively emotions of Christian pity, Acts, xvii. 16. Like his Master, he *went about doing good*. He was stimulated by an ardent disinterested zeal, worthy of being imitated by all, who love our Lord Jesus Christ, and his glorious gospel. When it is remembered that near one half of the human race are yet in gross darkness, it reflects disgrace upon the Christian world, that so few exertions have yet been made, to extend to them the knowledge of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and bespeaks an insensibility to the immense value of immortal souls. The subject has however at last awakened a more general attention. One new society for missions to the East Indies has been formed among the Baptists, and promises success. Another society is now forming upon a large and liberal scale; its promoters consist principally of Churchmen, Presbyterians, Independents, and Methodists. (*A heterogeneous mass indeed! methinks I hear some precise and over-prudential Christian murmur.*) The first meeting of the promoters of this design was held on the ever memorable fifth of November 1794, and a general meeting of such as wish to promote the design will be held in a short time.

and

and those who are the means of continuing the horrors and cruelties of war, must necessarily be enemies to the spirit of Christianity, and to them God may justly address the language which he spoke to his ancient people the Jews; *When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear; your hands are full of blood**. Could I extend my voice to all princes, statesmen, and people professing the Christian religion throughout the world, I would remind them, that, that religion consists in *laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings*†. I would call upon them to shew good will towards men, by reminding them of that beautiful description of the character, and happy tendency of the Christian religion, given by the apostle, under the idea of charity, without which our profession must be vain: *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth*‡.

Thirdly: Having attended to the nature of Christianity, and detailed some of the duties, which its professors owe to God, and their fellow-creatures (all which have been almost totally forgotten by the contending nations of Europe), I shall lastly direct

* Isa. i. 15.

† 1 Pet. ii. 1.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 4. 8.

your thoughts to that blissful period, when these exalted virtues shall be universally practised, and our world, which has hitherto been a field of blood, thereby be changed into a paradise.

Hope is one of the most powerful springs of human action, and assists the minds of men, to perform great and arduous undertakings, and to bear great fatigues and difficulties, in prospect of some future good. It acts somewhat similar in religion; the Christian is not only surrounded with trials and difficulties of a personal nature, which fatigue and harass the mind, and under which he often finds relief by anticipating that future glory, where sickness, and sorrow, and death are no more: But influenced by the spirit of his religion, which enlarges and refines the feeling of humanity, he commiserates the wretchedness of the world at large, which has been, and continues still to be, agitated and desolated by those unchristian and barbarous conflicts which arise from ambition and interest. Add to which, the melancholy reflection, that a great part of the world is at this day devoted to ignorance and sin, and the true God neither known, feared, nor worshipped. Let these considerations, my brethren, lead us to pray with the Psalmist, *Have respect to the covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty* *. If the sacred writer felt some horror at the brutal and savage temper of the countries which were enveloped in midnight dark-

* Psal. lxxiv. 20.

ness, what would he have thought, how would he have felt and expressed himself if he had lived in modern times; to have seen nations illuminated by science, and professing faith in, and obedience to the most wise and benevolent system of religion ever revealed to the world; and yet, under all those advantages, to have seen all these nations devising the most effectual and expeditious methods of destroying each other, and exercising the most revengeful temper in the prosecution of their designs? And yet while they thus act in direct violation of all the dictates of revealed religion, each of them appealing to God for the justice of their cause, they are under the most specious pretexts concealing the darkest and most abominable designs, even designs of ambition, conquest, and plunder. Let us then turn from scenes so disgusting, to the more pleasing prospects which the sacred volume opens to the view of believers. That God will make himself more glorious in the eyes of the world than has hitherto been done, is clearly affirmed in scripture prophecies. God is very jealous of the glory of his name*, and in the most solemn manner affirms that he will sanctify it†. It will be generally and universally done when the kingdom of Christ shall be set up in all the ends of the earth; then will the nations be suitably addressed in this delightful language, *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee*‡. Yea, *They shall see the*

* Deut. xxxii. 26, 27.

† Ezek. xxxvi. 23.

‡ Isa. lx. 1.

glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God*. The apostle John foretels the same great event, Rev. xy. 4. When God has thus made all human events subserve the manifestation of his own glory, then,

Peace on earth shall shed abroad its healing and refreshing influence in its full extent, accomplishing such prophecies as these : In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth†. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever; and my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places‡.

When the Lord shall thus have glorified himself in the earth, and extended the peaceful influence of his gospel to the uttermost parts of the habitable world, then also shall be accomplished those prophecies which point out the total cessation of all those diabolical passions which have so universally interrupted the abounding of harmony and good will among the children of men. This is described in a very forcible manner in the beautiful and highly figurative language of the prophet: *The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion, and the sucking together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox: And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the*

* Isa. xxxv. 2. † Psal. lxxii. 6. ‡ Isa. xxxii. 17, 18.

weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain *. Let us frequently and attentively study the prophecies which relate to the latter day glory, for the hastening of which we are taught to pray in that short but comprehensive petition, *Thy kingdom come* †. Christians should anticipate this glorious period of mercy and grace to Zion with abounding joy. Abraham, by the power of a strong faith, saw the day of Jesus Christ, and rejoiced in it ‡. Faith hath the same properties now ; it is at all times *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* §. Surely you will triumph in the expectation of that blissful period, when I briefly enumerate to you the blessings which are connected with that day, when the gospel shall have filled the earth with the glory of the Lord, and peace and good will among men.

When this happy and glorious state of the church, so long and so fully foretold in the scriptures, shall arrive, then the Sun of righteousness will diffuse his illuminating rays in every direction, no one corner of the world shall remain in darkness or the shadow of death, *for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea* ¶ ; then there will be an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit ||, which will no doubt produce an abundant increase of those heavenly blessings denominated *the fruit of the Spirit*, and thus enumerated

* Isa. xi. 6—9.

† Matt. vi. 10.

‡ John, viii. 56.

§ Heb. xi. 1.

¶ Hab. ii. 14

|| Isa. xxxii. 15.

by the apostle, *Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance* *: Then atheism, infidelity, and irreligion of every description, shall hide themselves, and the Lord *will come and rain righteousness* †. Yes, then will *judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream* ‡. The extent and universality of this blessing is set forth in a very strong expression of the prophet: *In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS TO THE LORD* §. Then also God's ancient people the Jews shall be delivered from the blindness, unbelief, and hardness of heart under which they have been so long shut up. This great event is not only prophesied of in the Old Testament, but there are frequent allusions to it in the New Testament also. They may however all be resolved into two leading points: First, that God hath not utterly cast them off ||: Secondly, that their blindness will continue *until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written: There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob* **. Curiosity may prompt some of you to ask the very question which the disciples did, *When shall these things be? And what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass* ††? Such enquiries are not perhaps improperly answered by the words of our

* Gal. v. 22, 23.

† Hosea, x. 12.

‡ Amos, v. 24.

§ Zech. xiv. 20.

|| Rom. xi. 1.

** Rom. xi. 25, 26.

†† Luke, xxi. 7.

Lord in another place; *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power* *. After all the calculations which have been made upon the exact period when these prophecies shall be fulfilled (some of which have already proved erroneous, though formed by men of much piety and learning), it is not improbable but they will rise to our view from amidst the darkness and confusion of the present state, as the sun emerging in its full splendour from behind a cloud which had for a season veiled its glory. The nature of the blessings which will attend the latter day glory, and the present calamitous state of the world, which we ought this day deeply to deplore, should induce us to anticipate it with great pleasure: Yea, let all hearts and all tongues unite this day in supplicating for peace on earth, and good will among men. How long, how long, O Lord? Come, Lord Jesus! come quickly!

CONCLUSION.

First; That the nation at large has much reason to be affected by its situation, and to be humbled under the mighty hand of God, is almost universally acknowledged. We are a *sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters* †. The restraints of religion and morality are cast off with disdain, and the things themselves estimated as suitable enough to the

* Acts, i. 7.

† Isa. i. 4.

lower orders of society, but hardly worth the notice of the fashionable world. Every effort is made to corrupt the minds of the rising generation with the sceptical principles of the age. Books of philosophy, history, and politics, together with almost every other species of reading, by which youth have generally been amused and instructed, are now made subservient to the purpose of instilling into them the baneful poison of infidelity: And while the enemy is thus sowing tares, those who should be most jealous for, and stand foremost to promote the interests of religion, are slumbering in indolence and indifference *. It is therefore the duty of every faithful minister to give the gospel trumpet a certain sound—to cry aloud, and spare not.

Secondly: Let us remember that the mere professions of contrition, and the transient devotions which attach themselves to such services as these, are neither profitable to us nor acceptable to God, without they are connected with unfeigned repentance, and a renunciation of our evil ways. The charge given to us to-day is that of the chapter which I read to you in the beginning of this service: *Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow* †. Without this God will say to us as to Israel, *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. When*

* Matt. xiii. 25.

† Isa. i. 16, 17.

ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me; the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is sin, even your solemn meeting. I cannot help expressing my fears, whether it may not be said of us as a people collectively, what was said of Israel, When he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and enquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant†.*

Thirdly: In all times of public calamity, as well as in all personal troubles, it is the duty of Christians to be much in prayer. Though Samuel was much grieved for the sin and folly of his people, yet he said, *Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you‡.* Our folly and sin have involved us in great straits and difficulties. Happy will it be for us if God is hedging up our way in mercy. It should not be so much the concern of Christians to pray only for temporal peace and prosperity, but rather that God would sanctify the visitations of his hand to our real good: that he would give us a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, deliver us from that corruption of principle, and that depravity of manners, which has of late increased upon us like an overwhelming torrent.

* Isa. i. 11, 12, 13. † Psal. lxxviii. 34—37. ‡ 1 Sam. xii. 23.

That was a wise but awful injunction which Samuel gave to the children of Israel, *Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly ye shall be destroyed, both ye and your king* *.

Fourthly : All those who believe and enter into the spirit of the Christian religion, have a pleasing source of reflection opened to them in the scripture doctrine of a superintending providence, which over-rules all human affairs. Yes, there is a God, whose all-searching eye surveys and ponders the secret and half-formed purposes of the minds of all who are the most conspicuous actors upon the stage of life; they may determine to follow their own inclinations and passions, and think it easy to carry their designs into execution, but they can effect nothing against the counsels of the Most High. The strong and wide-spreading storm which now agitates the kingdoms of the world, or, as it is in prophetic language, the shaking of *the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land* †, I have no doubt in my own mind are designed of God to accomplish his own purposes, fulfil scripture prophecies, and finally promote the glory of his own name, and the interest of his church. While therefore the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will, Christians have no ground to fear the gathering cloud; it portends no real injury to them; God is for them, and nothing

* 1 Sam. xii. 24, 25.

† Haggai, ii. 6.

can finally be against or harm them. *Trust ye therefore in the Lord Jehovah* *; enquire the path of duty, make the will and glory of God your highest end, and then you may leave all the rest to that God who numbers the hairs of your head, and suffereth not one to fall to the ground without his notice, and who has declared in his word, that he will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is staid upon him †.

Lastly : Having mentioned the path of duty, I shall conclude with pointing it out to you. It is as set forth in two interesting passages of scripture, and in the practice and experience of them we may smile at every trouble and every danger, and face them not only with calm serenity of mind, but with joy and triumph. The first is addressed to God's ancient people : *Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth also shall disclose her blood, and no more cover her slain* ‡. Surely God has come out of his place in these last days, and the devouring sword, which has lately gorged its thousands at a meal, is the *sword of the Lord* § drawn against the nations as a common punishment for their sin. Have we then followed the prophet's direction? are we hid from the impetuous storm? have we adopted the wise and

* Isa. xxvi. 4.

† Isa. xxvi. 3.

‡ Isa. xxvi. 19, 20.

§ Jer. xlvii. 6.

pious determination of the Psalmist: *In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast* *. The propriety and importance of this part of duty is again beautifully exemplified in that frame of mind under which a prophet of the Lord thus expressed himself: *When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble; when he cometh up to the people, he will invade them with his troops. Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength* †. Happy they who are enabled to exercise this faith, and who realize these feelings either in the prospect, or under the actual experience of public or private calamities. Finally, my brethren, I commend it to you as your privilege and duty, to exercise towards God a holy fear and an unbounded confidence; towards the civil powers, that measure of respect and obedience which the New Testament enjoins; towards your brethren in the faith and gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, abound in affection, kindness, humility, and long-suffering; and towards all men manifest a patient, peaceable, and forgiving temper. To encourage and strengthen your minds in the exercise of these dispositions, fix the eyes of your

* Psal. lvii. 1.

† Hab. iii. 16—18.

mind upon the promises of the latter day glory, believe them stedfastly, desire them earnestly, ruminate in your souls upon the happy period when earth shall again become a paradise; mercy and truth shall again meet together, and righteousness and peace shall kiss each other *; and all tongues, all hearts, shall unite in this grand chorus, *Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will towards men.*

* Psa. lxxxv. 10.

FINIS.

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